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## CICERO'S POLITICAL SYMPATHIES

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There is no purpose to open here in detail the question of Cicero's career as a public man. That has been amply done, both to his advantage and to his disadvantage, by editors, biographers, and historians. It will be sufficient to follow in a general way the changes in criticism of Cicero as a man and statesman, particularly the change from the extremely unfavorable criticism by German scholars of fifty years ago, and to note some of the more recent discussions which bring us to what is probably not far from a final estimate of his life and character. Even such a limited review as this would scarcely seem justifiable were it not for the fact that Cicero is read every year by a new generation of students, and the further fact that usually only those parts are read—a few of the orations and letters—from which the least favorable view of Cicero is obtained, and from which students, sometimes teachers also, carry away wrong impressions. Added to this is the consideration that the earlier and partial criticism referred to, which went so many years unchallenged, is still felt and occasionally echoed in handbooks on Roman history and literature.

Antique criticism of Cicero as a public man is partly favorable, partly hostile, differing in this respect from the unanimous verdict which proclaimed him as an orator *disertissime Romuli nepotum*. Specially favorable is the estimate of Velleius (2.66) and Quintilian (xii. 1.16). Favorable and yet discriminating are the words of Livy (*Frag. lib. cxx*) given at the conclusion of his account of Cicero's death: "si quis tamen virtutibus vitia pensarit, vir magnus, acer, memorabilis fuit, et in cuius laudes persequendas Cicerone laudatore opus fuerit." Judging from the dearth of instances in which Cicero is mentioned by his contemporaries, one might conclude that his public acts had been such as to cause them

to withhold their admiration. But Cicero's case is not unique. It is possible to cite many instances where an author, for reasons not easily discovered, is either inadequately dealt with or passed unnoticed by the writers of his day. Nor is it surprising that after Cicero's death the political descendants of the parties of Pompey and Caesar should have exerted their efforts to prejudice the memory of the great orator. In later Roman times little concern was exercised about Cicero as a statesman. Coming down to the time of the Renaissance it is apparent that the unbounded admiration felt for Cicero as a stylist (cf. Zielinski, *Cicero im Wandel der Jahrhunderte*, Leipzig, 1908) made impossible at that time, and for generations of later scholars, any careful and critical estimate of his personal character and political career. This influence together with the importance attached to Cicero's political and philosophical writings preceding and following the period of the French Revolution paved the way for that blind adulation of Cicero found in the writings of Middleton, Trollope, and Niebuhr, a point of view which today seems as untenable and quite as irritating as the criticism which a little later went to the opposite pole.

It was inevitable, however, that the lavish and indiscriminating homage paid Cicero by these admirers should evoke against him a series of bitter criticisms. These are represented by the extreme views of Drumann and Mommsen, which were directly responsible for the succeeding long period during which Cicero was greatly undervalued not only as a public man but as an author. Drumann's estimate (*Gesch. Roms*, VI, § 112 f.) seems today much more like a caricature than serious criticism. In it Cicero is charged with want of respect for justice and truth, lack of patriotism, selfishness, cowardice, vindictiveness—so many bad qualities that it would seem impossible for him to have possessed a single admirable trait of character. Mommsen (*Roman Hist.*, Bk. V, chap. v) in a pointed and malicious sketch, while taking the pains to adduce scarcely an instance in support of his views pronounces him a "notorious political trimmer," who gave allegiance now to the democrats, at times to Pompey, and at times to the aristocrats, a man who loaned his services as an advocate to every man of influence, without distinction of person or party.

The first significant reaction against the influence of these detractors is observable in the brilliant work of Boissier (*Cicéron et ses amis*, Paris, 1884). In general this author follows the historical method in studying the political phenomena of Cicero's day as against the severely judicial method which would look at facts as simple and unrelated. Not only does he give an estimate of Cicero's character and political acts which later critics have indorsed as admirably just, but he suggests with considerable plausibility that the unfriendly attitude of German critics is due to their isolation in academic pursuits, and that their lack of experience in public affairs has unfitted them for sympathetic review of Cicero's political career. He says (p. 26):

One who has lived a witness to practical affairs, in the midst of the workings of political parties, is better enabled to understand the sacrifices which are demanded of a public man by the exigencies of the moment. On the other hand one is prone to harshness in judgment when he measures such a man's conduct solely by rigid theories [formulated in seclusion and untried in actual life.

The very opposite reason, a more intimate knowledge of political life and its exigencies, is made to account for the greater sympathy manifested toward Cicero in England and in France. Boissier is doubtless confirmed in this belief, as to his own country at least, by a truth expressed in a later work (*La conjuration de Catilina*, Paris, 1905), viz., that in the history of no other country is to be found so much that gives illumination to the political situation at Rome in the time of the Republic as is observable in the temper and behavior of the body politic in France. Further, Boissier deprecates the misleading way in which Drumann and Mommsen made microscopic search of Cicero's frank and unguarded correspondence—never intended for publication (cf. *ad. Att.* i. 9.1; i. 16.8)—and accepting the statements found there as indicative of the author's settled political conviction and practice, drew up against him the most serious charges of insincerity, duplicity, and inconsistency.

Perhaps no work has done more to bring about a fairer estimate of Cicero than that of Tyrrell-Purser (*Correspondence of Cicero*, London, 1885). It constitutes easily the most extensive apology

for Cicero that has appeared, and has a special claim on our attention by reason of the authors' long and exhaustive study of Cicero's life and writings. The editing and arranging in chronological sequence of every letter in the collection not only gives an intimate and accurate knowledge of the facts extending over a period of twenty-five years, but puts the editors in a position to draw conclusions far more intelligently than any partial study could do. By means of quotations from the letters, summaries are given of the evidence which, in the judgment of the editors, vindicates Cicero's character and motives at many points where previously misapprehended or deliberately misrepresented. Noteworthy is the evidence presented which defends Cicero in his relations with the democratic faction in his early career, his subsequent attitude toward the Triumvirs, and his choice of sides in the civil war. The first of these constitutes the gravamen of Mommsen's charge, as also that of Beesly (*Catiline, Clodius, and Tiberius*, London, 1878) and of Pretor (*Letters of Cicero to Atticus*, London, 1891). Recently the orations also, those delivered prior to the year 63, have been examined with a view to ascertaining their bearing on Cicero's early political tendencies. Heinze (*Abh. der kgl. sächs. Gesellschaft der Wissenschaft.*, Leipzig, 1909) maintains that the speeches up to the time of the consulate present on Cicero's part a firm and constant adhesion to the principles of the moderate optimates. Bardt (*Ber. phil. Wochenschr.*, April, 1910) in a review of Heinze's conclusions seeks to show, however, that in these speeches there is found support of the popular party, notably the speech for the Manilian Law, representing a case undertaken by Cicero in direct sympathy with the popular party and to win the favor of Pompey.

In no small measure the more favorable judgment of Cicero which obtains among German scholars today is due to Aly (*Cicero, sein Leben und seine Schriften*, Berlin, 1891). While admitting Cicero's failures of character Aly condemns the attempt of historians to belittle a great man's life by the bringing forward of petty and irrelevant incidents and allowing these to prejudice the more favorable conclusions which would result if facts were put in their right perspective. These attempts he denounces as revealing, not the scientific spirit of the investigator, but the malicious

curiosity of one seeking material to support a preconceived theory. However, Aly's work is disappointing in certain particulars. It does not give that clear and detailed examination of Cicero's political acts that we should naturally expect. It shows a too obvious attempt to explain his acts as those of a hero rather than to let the letters speak for themselves and lead to whatever conclusion they will. There is no discussion of the legal questions involved in the conviction and execution of the Catiline conspirators. Moreover, the letters to Atticus, the fountain-source for grave charges, are not examined and discussed with necessary fulness. And while it does add to our sympathy for Cicero to say that it was the great misfortune of his life that he ever began a political career, it does not meet political issues that a biographer should stand ready to meet and explain.

Schmidt (*Der Briefwechsel des M. Tullius Cicero*, Leipzig, 1893) regards Boissier's reproach against German scholars as not undeserved, maintaining that there is not only need of a change in criticism, but that as a consequence of larger political experience in Germany evidences of such a change are already at hand. He says (p. 18):

The greater part of his [Cicero's] modern German critics, especially Drumann and Mommsen, in their work resemble pathologists rather than historians. We indulge the hope, however, that, inasmuch as the German people have at least begun to put off the swaddling clothes of political life, the severe and unjust estimates of Cicero which emanated *ex cathedra* in a time of political stagnation will no longer find utterance, especially since in political matters of real importance the last decades have brought about views wholly different from the purely theoretical ones of earlier days. It seems to me necessary, therefore, that from the ban and burden of these old verdicts we again raise ourselves to a just estimate of the great orator and patriot.

The same author says even more emphatically (*Zeitschr. für das Gymnasialwesen*, 1896, p. 84):

In opposition to this [Drumann's view] it is high time for us to give fundamental revision to our entire conception of the personality of Cicero, especially our impression of his career as a statesman in the light of the thorough investigation in his correspondence which has been made and is now being made, to the end that first of all our teachers in the *Gymnasia*, then our entire youth, may have before them an objective likeness of this remarkable man, who not only as an orator and stylist towered above the men of his day, but who in a

time of sensuality and low aims remained true to high moral character, and devoted to certain ideals for which he shed his own blood.

Schmidt's work is a careful examination and arrangement in chronological order of one hundred seventeen letters of the correspondence, covering the years 51-44 B.C., from Cicero's proconsulate in Cilicia to Caesar's murder. At the time of publication it was the author's intention to make a like study of the letters previous to the proconsulate and those written after Caesar's death. But from the part already covered he concludes that writers on Roman history have examined Cicero's correspondence very superficially; that a study of the letters in their proper order and relation shows that Cicero's political acts are not only comprehensible but exhibit definite purpose and plans; that despite weaknesses he held true to his ideal of a constitutional state; that his writings on political science and philosophy are in harmony with his public career far more than is ordinarily conceded, and that these writings are not mere attempts at authorship but the utterances of a man striving toward high ideals and inward peace.

Beebe (*Die Haltung Cicero's beim Ausbruch des Bürgerkrieges*, Zürich, 1900) gives an exhaustive historical-psychological study of Cicero's political movements and choice of sides at the beginning of the civil war. It is just here that his reputation has been most bitterly assailed. Beebe thinks that the truth lies between the views expressed by Drumann and Mommsen and those of Aly and Schmidt. This is practically the conclusion reached by Tyrrell—that Cicero followed Pompey as leader of the Optimates and the one man in whom he saw any hope for a restored republic; that it was the weakness and selfishness of Pompey and his party that made Cicero hesitate to join them, while nothing short of a change in his nature could have made it possible for Cicero in honor to follow Caesar. Beebe's investigation, however, adds nothing essential to the results reached in the clear and convincing examination of the same period by Tyrrell, with which work the author seems unfamiliar, or which, at any rate, is not mentioned. The general conclusions are: that much of Cicero's patriotism was born of the desire to win personal honor and the esteem of his contemporaries; that notwithstanding his self-seeking he strove to serve the

welfare of the state; that we expect much of Cicero and accuse in him much that we readily condone in others who stood on a lower moral level than he; that no statesman of that time or of the present could pass unscathed through such a fiery test as Cicero has made for himself by leaving us in his letters an authentic record of those passing thoughts and mental waverings which reveal a man's weaknesses, however good his intentions and noble his ideals.

In a paper by Ruth E. Messenger (*Cicero's Correspondence as an Evidence of his Political Sympathies*), submitted as a thesis for the A.M. degree at the University of Illinois, June, 1911, an independent examination is made of the entire question of Cicero's public life. The plan of Miss Messenger's work and its conclusions can be given only in a general way. One chapter is devoted to a study of the nature and value of the evidence found in the letters, showing that the evidence is not to be regarded as scientific or organized. A second considers the comparative value of the speeches and letters as evidence, particularly that based on utterances in both upon the same subject. It is shown that the statements contained in the letters are the correct ones (because Cicero is not speaking here as an advocate), except in those cases—and they not infrequent—in which Cicero was self-deceived. Then follows a study of the letters in chronological order with a discussion of every act of political significance therein recorded. The most important conclusion reached is that "Cicero's career was consistently that of a constitutionalist." This position is maintained with vigor and in great detail and as the only rational basis on which may be explained Cicero's relations with Pompey, Caesar, and Octavius.

It is apparent from the number and importance of the investigations passed in review that there has come about a complete reversal of verdict in Cicero's favor, and a more general recognition of the fact that those very qualities which unfitted him to be a successful politician were the ones which fitted him so peculiarly to be a past master in the interpretation and transmission of antique culture and formal refinement.